DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 326 102 HE 024 002

AUTHOR Griswold, Carolyn; Macfie, Ian
TITLE Personal Qualities and Highly Visible Presidents. ASHE Annual Meeting Paper.
PUB DATE Nov 90
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (Portland, OR, November 1-4, 1990).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Characteristics; Administrator Evaluation; *Administrator Qualifications; *Administrator Role; Administrator Selection; Career Ladders; *College Presidents; Faculty Publishing; Group Membership; Higher Education; Institutional Characteristics; Intellectual Disciplines; Leadership Qualities; Productivity; Professional Associations; Reputation; Scholarship
IDENTIFIERS American Association of State Colleges and Univs; *ASHE Annual Meeting; Association of American Colleges; Association of American Universities; National Assn of State Univ and Land Grant Coll

ABSTRACT

A study investigated selected personal characteristics of 124 highly visible presidents belonging to four institutional associations that include among their members the nation's major universities and four-year colleges (National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, American Association of State Colleges and Universities, Association of American Colleges, and Association of American Universities). Visibility was determined by such characteristics as election to high associational office, major addresses at national meetings, appointments to national commissions, and publications dealing with higher education policy issues. Background characteristics included academic discipline, institutional prestige, scholarly productivity, and career pattern. Correlation of background characteristics and visibility suggests that while the characteristics are not highly related to visibility, they appear to be important in the screening process of search committees. The findings suggests the emergence of a "career president" who begins to concentrate on administration early in his/her career. In addition, appreciable variation in association membership exists with regard to presidential requirements. The importance of examining the interplay of all presidential background characteristics with association membership and professional prominence is emphasized. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED326102

PERSONAL QUALITIES AND HIGHLY VISIBLE PRESIDENTS

Carolyn Griswold and Ian Macfie
Institute of Higher Education
University of Georgia

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

ASHE

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

HE 024 002

ASHE

Texas A&M University
Department of Educational
Administration
College Station, TX 77843
(409) 845-0393

ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held at the Red Lion-Jantzen Beach in Portland, Oregon, November 1-4, 1990. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

Personal Qualities and Highly Visible Presidents

Carolyn Griswold and Ian Macfie
Institute of Higher Education
University of Georgia

Developing "more effective methods" of selecting and evaluating academic leaders has been termed "one of higher education's perennial problems" (Fincher, 1989). Demographic studies of college and university presidents (Fincher, 1988; Green, 1988) provide profiles of "typical" presidents on which to base study of presidential leadership. Green's profile portrays a typical president who is "white, male, married, and 53 years old." This president is likely to have an extensive administrative background in which most career moves took place between similar types of institutions. Fincher (1988) points out the continuing power of demographics in decision-making by search committees and stating that valid evaluation of presidents must be based on performance, not background characteristics. He calls for more attention to "situational demands and institutional conditions that interact with individual qualifications and performance."

This paper is based on exploratory research underway at the Institute of Higher Education at the University of Georgia relating presidential personal qualities (background academic and professional characteristics) to institutional characteristics exhibited by membership in four national associations "that are based on common institutional purposes and needs" (Fincher, 1989). Whereas Green examined comparisons among types of institutions,

this research explores shared characteristics along lines of associational membership first suggested by Fincher (1989) as appropriate to the classification of presidential types. This ongoing study at the Institute focuses not on individual university presidents or institutions but on the relationship of background characteristics (personal qualities) with associational affiliation and degree of visibility. Previous studies by Fincher, examining NASULGC and AASCU presidents, have been expanded to include AAC and AAU presidents.

This paper is a study of selected person characteristics of highly visible presidents in four major institutional associations that include among their members the nation's major universities and four-year colleges. The visibility of each presidents was decided by events such as "election to high associational office, major addresses at national meetings, appointments to national commissions, and publications dealing with policy issues in higher education (as opposed to publication in one's academic discipline)" (Fincher, 1989).

Although visibility is not offered as a surrogate for effectiveness, it is often considered an attribute of effective leadership and as a measure of professional reputation. Further, presidential visibility has increased in significance as a result of the growing importance of outside constituencies. Institutions project a positive image through the visibility of their presidents, helping them to compete for financial support, top faculty and students. It must be emphasized that differences among

associations in regard to visibility and background characteristics do not denote levels of superiority for presidents or associations, but do seem to reflect differences in goals and missions.

Research Design

This paper focuses on the background variables of highly visible presidents in each of four national associations (Table 1): the Association of American Colleges (AAC), the Association of American Universities (AAU), the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), and the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (NASULGC).

Table 1. Population and Sample Size by Association

ASSOCIATION	Population Number	Population Percent	Sample Number	Sample Percent	Highly Visible Number	Highly Visible Percent
AAU	55	100	55	100	27	49
NASULGC	123	100	78	63	29	37
AASCU	374	100	193	52	39	20
AAC	609	100	123	20	29	24
Total	1,161	100	449	39	124	27

Institutional members of these four associations comprise the majority of major degree-granting institutions in the U.S. Two-year institutions and very specialized institutions (such as technical schools or seminaries) were excluded from the study, as presidents of these institutions are not as likely to be included in Who's Who in America.

The information necessary for this study of presidential

profiles is readily available from sources such as Who's Who. Data was collected on four variables: academic discipline, institutional prestige, scholarly productivity, and career pattern. A scale from one to four was developed, designating the degree, level, or extent of each background characteristics. Chosen because of their simplicity and their availability, these variables are offered influential variables in presidential selection rather than criteria of later effectiveness. They are defined briefly as follows:

1. Academic discipline refers to the discipline in which the president received his/her terminal degree. The importance of this variable is a fact of life in the recruitment, selection and appointment of presidents, deans, and other academic administrators.

2. Institutional prestige is the relative standing of the university from which the president received his/her terminal degree. It is also a measure of institutional reputation.

3. Scholarly productivity reflects the extent to which presidents have published scholarly or professional books and articles either before or during their administrative tenure.

4. Career pattern refers to the professional experience of presidents prior to their current presidential appointment. It indicates the extent to which presidents rise through administrative ranks and whether or not presidents move

between institutions of different prestige levels. Although a background characteristic, this variable is also in some ways a measure of administrative performance, and is highly important in presidential selection.

The variables of academic discipline and institutional prestige are knowingly subjective, but their taxonomy is borne out by a silent consensus about levels of prestige, reputation, and quality. The Carnegie Classification of institutions might have been used as a measure of institutional prestige and would have produced similar results. However, a less complex reputational measure was developed, simplifying research and better reflecting measures of reputation used by search committees.

Other sources, such as association newsletters, bulletins, magazines or journals, provided data on the dependent variable, presidential visibility. Visibility was then measured on a nominal scale (1,0).

By using Who's Who and other publications as primary sources, data collection was kept at a readily available level in terms of time and money. Using these sources for this exploratory research also avoided intruding on busy presidents with interviews and questionnaires. It is recognized, however, that this method of data collection does have limitations. Material in Who's Who, for example, while accurate, is self-reported, and may contain omissions.

Research Results

Examining the correlation of visibility with background

characteristics and association membership produced some promising results. Visibility does appear to be significantly related with scholarly productivity, AAU membership and AASCU membership, (Table 2). The correlation of administrative prominence with the production of scholarly research suggests that highly visible presidents, more than non-highly visible presidents, have established publication records in their academic careers. Since a publication record pertaining to administration and to the association is one measure of visibility, it is not surprising that highly visible presidents begin their careers as scholarly writers.

Table 2. Correlation of Institutional and Background Characteristics with Presidential Visibility

VARIABLE	Discipline	Prestige	Scholarly Productivity	Career Pattern	AAU	NASULGC	AASCU	AAC
Presidential Visibility	-.02 .6995	.07 .1022	.18 .0001	-.04 .3469	.18 .0001	.09 .0378	-.14 .0022	-.05 .2405

Presidential membership in two associations was also related to visibility. AAU presidential membership has a significant (< .005) positive correlation (.18) with visibility, indicating the emphasis of this association on national recognition and academic reputation. AASCU presidential membership has a significant (<.005) negative correlation (-.14) with visibility, indicating that visibility through professional service and national reputation is less prominent in the duties of AASCU presidents.

The associational patterns, as displayed in Figure 1, distinguish presidents in the four major national associations as

identifiable groups based on background characteristics. For example, strong administrative backgrounds are shown to be quite important for highly visible AASCU presidents, who have the lowest means for academic discipline (M=2.8), institutional prestige (M=2.4) and scholarly productivity (M=2.0) and the highest mean for career pattern (M=3.7). The career pattern mean for AAU (M=3.2) and AAC (M=3.1) presidents are lower than those for NASULGC (M=3.6) and AASCU (M=3.7), indicating a greater emphasis on professional administrators in the latter associations.

The general patterns that emerge are in keeping with expectations. Scholarly productivity, shown to be significantly correlated with visibility (Table 2), appears, nevertheless, through its low mean scores to be of least importance in the professional lives of these presidents, when compared to other background variables. That busy administrators find themselves unable or uninterested in continuing scholarly research is not surprising.

Although administrative backgrounds are clearly important, the relatively high means for academic discipline and institutional prestige reflect the continuing importance of academic credentialing. AAU presidents had the highest mean (M=3.4) for institutional prestige, followed by AAC presidents (M=2.8), NASULGC presidents (M=2.6) and AASCU presidents (M=2.4). This ranking can be interpreted as showing the importance for institutions of looking to graduates of similar institutions for presidential candidates. It is to be expected that AAU presidents, for example,

graduated from AAU institutions, while AASCU presidents, for example, are more likely to have graduated from AASCU institutions.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this strictly exploratory research suggests that these variables, although not highly related to visibility, appear to be important in the screening process of search committees. Evidently, presidents are not picked at random from an open pool of candidates and differences among institutions and their missions become important when examining qualifications of potential presidents. Some general patterns exist. This research suggests the emergence of the "career" president, who began to concentrate early in his/her career on administration. However, appreciable variation among the four associations does exist and associational crossover for presidents is limited by the need for presidents to meet the specialized requirements of institutions within national associations. Presidents who have concentrated on building the administrative careers expected in AASCU institutions may not meet the academic background requirements that appear to be expected of AAU or AAC presidents.

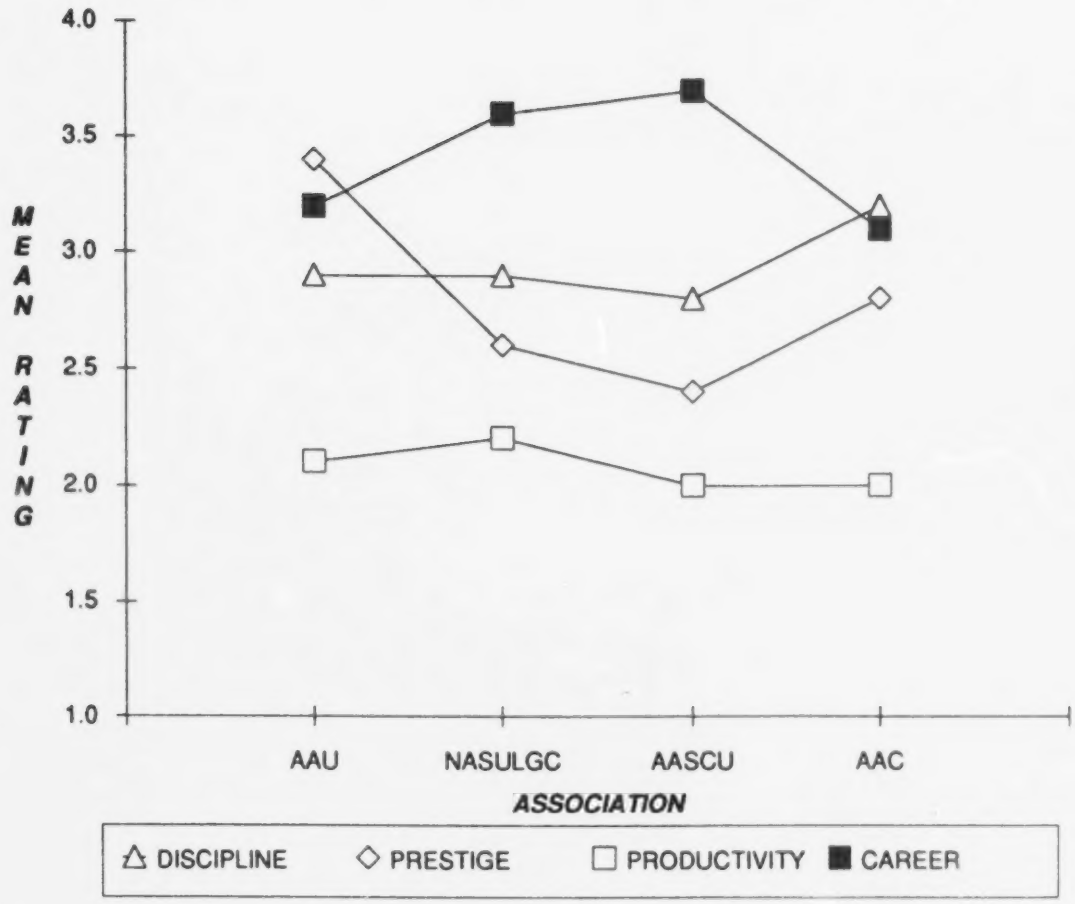
Although it is hoped that this study reinforces the importance of presidential selection based upon merit of both background characteristics and professional service by providing measures more easily and readily used, state and university politics cannot be disregarded. In one particular state, it was found that the common background characteristic for its state university and college presidents was previous service in that state's government.

This research suggests the importance of examining the interplay of all presidential background characteristics with associational membership and administrative prominence in the study, selection and evaluation of academic presidents. As more attention is paid to past administrative experience, presidential selection committees and evaluators must focus on more than simply the previous appointment. No one single background or visibility credential can be used to predict presidential performance, but together they may be used as indicators in the complex task of fitting institutions to appropriate presidents for presidential leadership.

Performance is difficult to measure, at best. Evaluation of performance is a collection of snapshots of performance at different times during different circumstances with a bias towards the obvious. Crucial presidential decision-making often remains a private matter, which is nonetheless evaluated in limited terms of that which is known.

Future studies will need to examine the relationship between effectiveness and both visibility and background characteristics within institutional settings, as these factors do contribute to the selection and evaluation of presidents. In addition, researchers may examine recent changes in presidential background characteristics, in particular the shift to increased professionalism for university presidents, to evaluate the effects of these trends on academic leadership.

Figure 1.
MEAN RATINGS
BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS
ACROSS ASSOCIATIONS
Highly Visible Presidents (N=124)



	AAU	NASULGC	AASCU	AAC
DISCIPLINE	2.9	2.9	2.8	3.2
PRESTIGE	3.4	2.6	2.4	2.8
PRODUCTIVITY	2.1	2.2	2.0	2.0
CAREER	3.2	3.6	3.7	3.1

References

Fincher, Cameron. The Demographics of Presidential Leadership. Research in Higher Education, 1988, 29(1), 92-96.

Fincher, Cameron. Being, Becoming, Behaving: Key Indicators in Presidential Leadership. Paper presented at the 29th Annual Meeting of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, San Francisco, November, 1989.

Green, Madeleine F. The American College President: A Contemporary Profile. Washington, DC: American Council on Education, 1988.

ABSTRACT

This paper is a study of selected personal characteristics of highly visible presidents in four institutional associations that include among their members the nation's major universities and four-year colleges. The variables of academic discipline, institutional prestige, scholarly productivity and career pattern are related to presidential visibility, an attribute of presidential leadership and performance, in the context of associational membership. Although administrative background emerges as the background characteristic most important to these presidents, associational differences were apparent. This paper suggests the importance of examining the interplay of all presidential background characteristics with associational membership and administrative prominence in the study, selection and evaluation of academic presidents.